

SMOKE



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Grant Wood's American Landscape

This is not real: this is the shape of a dream spun
By a strong man with xray eyes that see
Through enormous planes of sun the design that no sun
Can reveal clear any more: at best we remember vaguely, seeing
These mornings these afternoons these clean
Men and women like a child's long day in the sunlight that no one
Remembers any more: it is drenched, it is gone in the sun.

But this is the way it was, and this is the way the old men
Dreamed it in our beginning: proud land with no end:
Patterned with quilt-like honesty and fenced
For honesty but not to keep anyone out or anyone in:
Patterned with the sure line of the plow and the bright line
Of the corn and the colors of soil changing changing
As far as the sky in the shadows of wind.

And this
Is the way it was, but this is not real: these houses white,
Precise, angled with safety, islanded in the rich grass:
These people going and coming at fruitful chores: these barns' weight
Solid beyond the fat-cheeked trees in the sun: and the land in the sun
Immensely stretched and never too much to roll and reach
Farther than we could say, and everywhere such strictness
Set upon luxury justly: these tracks of the share and the wheel
Show that the men are sure and wise in their labor, they go back
And forth too clean and sure: they are not real.

There is too much sun. There is too much peace.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT.

S M O K E

Epitaph

He thought when he was younger
That he could live along
The body-side of thunder
And be acute and strong.

Lightning was his hunger,
To cleave a cloud at will;
But rains arrive and thunder
Where he is lying still.

Florida Death

He has made for her a garden,
That though she never move she be its warden,
That though she never stir
She be its motionless dead gardener.
In the midst of it he has made for her of stone
A look-out where if she but turn her head
She may gaze upon the sea and venture forth to tread
Its edge as living she has often done.
So through great nights and ample days
He leaves a little door, no matter who may pass,
Wide open to the six-foot shield of glass
Above her form recumbent and the lid-held gaze,
Yet she makes no sign of difference or of praise;
Vernal she meets the vernal sun,
Autumnal welcomes with no stir of pain
The autumnal hurricane.

Impartial Be

As to the moment of your going, sir.
You have no gauge:
Youth is as often executioner
As age.

Impartial therefore be to old and young
And neither favour,
Not knowing when their hearts or yours be wrung
Forever.

WITTER BYNNER.

S M O K E

Ordination

(for M. J. C.)

1.

streetcars bind their rumble
to the afternoon

and to the night
the mournful flight of hours
divides and ties the sun to sun
the city reeks of effort

and the land
rusts against the barns
and the shards of broken plows
o unfathomed epoch

the farthing
bent beneath the muscled clutch
the eager urge of sex prostrate
the urinals undrained

and a crust
of tyrants on the eyes
the bargain
of the cakes and coffee sells the heart

2.

this then prevails against
the mild intoxication of a thought
the dancing swiftness of a minute spins
and the mind goes dizzy
down a skidding ramp

you falter?
the fingers char the railing
to delay the sliding heels
the grimed collaboration of the senses
fails

and the tunnel of the mind
screams with the winds

SMOKE

then offer words
at the mirrored prayerplate
of the firebox on the corner
rouse the sudden sirens
and the helmets
of the red brigade
the flames are mad
3.
o slight comrade
bridge the corners
gap the chasms of the torrents
turn the nozzles of reflection
on the windy fires
and hold a braking
toe against the angle of the stairs
rubbertire the streetcars
count the hours
condemn the dam
and end the drought on rusted land
and thought
the red prevails
in fire and rust
and blood
the end is screaming sirens
and the slur of tyrant cataracts
torn from the eyes
you falter?
then grind the molars into rage
and turn the hurt of pulled and aching
hair-roots from the streaming bitter tears
(acid on the cheeks)
rouse the flames
and burn the reddest fire against
the night
good blood coagulates

LAWRENCE A. HARPER

Three New Sonnets

1.

The clock within the steeple strikes the hour,
And in the corner of a further tower
A dull grey pigeon preens his bony wing
The while upon the street a boy is singing.
Blended together are the sounds at twilight,
The brittle scratch of the pigeon's bill on his feathers,
The strained high pitch of a youth's song sung on the pavement,
The low monotony of time rattling the steeple.
The pigeon ceases his scratching, rests on his cornice,
The voice that has offered up song is lost in the city,
Only the clock with its tireless motion unchanging
Presses the minute hand forward into the hours.
Slowly the hours revolve around the sun,
And in the sun another bell is ringing.

2.

If wisdom were not born to crows and men
The one would eat against the other's bones.
I would not relish crow meat, and I doubt
If any ravager when he found me out
Would relish mine. But such was not to be.
Nature gave earth unto the crows and me.
I till the soil. I break the crusted sod.
I think on springs and wasterlings and God:
And then I spread the corn seed and I know
The crows to follow where my harrows go.
It is not that I would complain or bring
Destruction down upon the feathered thing.
It is not that I would begrudge him food.
Only sometimes beneath the print of dawn,
When I awake to find my planting gone,
When I meet spring and never a shoot is out:

S M O K E

Only sometimes down under the rain I shout,
Breaking my heart for the plight of the crow and me—
After the penitence where will survival be.

3.

Think not when the diggers trouble the mottled soil
To shift it a little and lay my body in,
That I shall be glorified out on another sphere
Or skimming the ether waves this side of oblivion.
Nothing so generous, nothing so fleet, is death.
The breath is gone out of the shell and what is become of it?
Lonely on a pinnacle topping the sky does the breath go,
Looking for a destiny that never was tableted.
Wonder no more that I am a star student nightly,
Plodding about on the earth with my eyes to heaven,
Searching the spaces with always a humble staring,
For what shall my poor human retribution be?
Oh I shall go down like a mole in the night in the dust,
And never come out again, and all the stars forgotten.

ELIZABETH JANE ASTLEY

S M O K E

Diurne

(Day speaks:)

One world at a time, Thoreau?

I roam about the Cracherode
Room of the British Museum interring
ideas dead of statistical vertigo.
The sad young men I leave outside
wondering where is the charmed life,
counting leaves as they burst, birds as they hatch,
overlooking that their profiles don't match.
(Meanwhile in mid-Pacific
Night kisses an islander's cheek
to tint his dream of a jade-lute song
performed for Lady Yang.
Is this the Feast of the Peonies?
Is he for tonight Li Po?)

One world at a time, Thoreau?
Are we through our pantomime?

I roam till I overtake
a liner hammocked in the fog of dawn. Half-awake
passengers crowd the rail to see
the Statue of Liberty
and the home of the brave and the land of the free.
I have no cuff
to snicker up.
I roam across America,
through cities big with structure
and the snarling pronunciamento:
"Rockefeller is my uncle but he pays me not a cent . . ."
(The withered fist of Zoroaster
lies limp in Asia's lap . . . Five fingers

S M O K E

ache from having too long directed the angels
of water and fire, of beasts and plants and metals.
Zoroaster is tonight a nomad
wanting only woman on dry sand.)

One world at a time, Thoreau?
Are we through our pantomime?
Then let the play begin, Thoreau!

My path is dull . . .
rehearsed . . . traditional . . .
I call around the earth to Night:
"Must you sit
on the whole chair?
I am too old. Move over there!"
(For the dust of broken empires
makes an easy trail for dark to wind:
a Russian peasant will cheat
God himself . . . or even Stalin . . .
the hypocrite's
mask is cheap among the Muscovites . . .
Hitler Hitler ueber alles . . . white threads
for Jewish shrouds . . . random vivisection
of a Cézanne apple . . . chandeliers sinking
closer to the floor . . .
saying goodbye is nothing to me anymore . . .
I say, matey, will y' call me a cab?
I ought to ride somewhere: I've got six bob . . .)

One world at a time, Thoreau?
Are we through our pantomime?
Then let the play begin, Thoreau!
Soon it will be time to go.

KERKER QUINN

S M O K E

Poem

If being blind
of mind
and still of breath
is death—
then he is dead.
Instead

of immortality
inherited to compensate
him for his all too human fate
he only found finality,

tentative though it be—
time will pour over him,
shale him or clover him,
lift him or lower him

time and the sod—
no reason or god.

To You,
On Our Second Wedding Anniversary

Tonight I sit to share this rite with none.
The reminiscences awake and soar
Only to fall, soft as they had begun.
Tonight I sit—and wish you here no more.
The years—or is it moons?—are soulless clay;
No Hebrew god adept to will it breathe.
And we who dared to violate and slay
Shall boldly weave the mortuary wreath.
Let no rebuke or censure mar this love—
I hold of it what death will not subdue.
For this I lift the brimming grail above
To dedicate a grateful toast to you.

Tonight I cut the obligating thread
And vault in peace the troubled lost—the dead.

S M O K E

Captive

How many times from wall to wall
I walk and turn and walk, and all
of mind and space careen and reel
uncertain on the cosmic wheel!

There is no tangent way to take
unswervingly beyond—to break
the hold centripetal, unseen
that curves impediments between

a lifted palm and lifted eyes
and what men dream of paradise;
but walls and walls to stop and turn,
to bind
and blind us and inurn.

WALTER BENTON ·

Deserted Cornfield, 1861-1933

(near Hingham, Mass.)

Enter the darkness of these pines and pace
 Slowly the brown pine-needle matted ground.
Your wary feet—front, left, rear, right—will trace
 Unseen, one step apart, mound after mound.
Scarcely had cloven ground concealed the seed
 In that far spring of 1861
When men must leave the field to worm and weed
 And change the hoe for bayonet and gun.
Alone, each thin green blade must meet the year's
 Assault; a wild unkempt and blighted field,
Leaves withered, brittle stalks, and shriveled ears,
 Half-formed and meagre, were the only yield,
Not worth—and this was well—the harvesting;
 For hands which once laid cornstalks teepee-wise
Now reared with locking-ring on locking-ring
 A steely tent to threat the evening skies;
And supple hands which once had bled to husk it,
 Or shelled the grain from ear with tub and spade,
Now chilled upon the barrel of a musket
 Or stiffened to a sword with broken blade.
Unhoed, uncut, unharvested, the corn
 Died and decayed, then crumbled to the ground,
Leaving of dust from which it had been born
 About each root a small perpetual mound.
And flocks of pines, hatched from an egg of earth,
 Put forth dark plumes and spread broad wings, like crows
Waiting for phantom grain to have its birth
 From sterile graves of corn in ordered rows
Close pines of three-score years now rise mast-high;
 Beneath, a sod of coarse brown needles paves
The untilled earth. What hopes and fancies lie
 Forever in these low invisible graves?

KENNETH W. PORTER

S M O K E

Habit of Speech

My fathers farmed Missouri mud
and Mississippi clay . . .

But you?

I've got, besides their bones and blood,
some farming of my own to do.

*On ten square feet of city floor
you cannot even call your own?*

Those fathers, they were also poor.

What virtues had their blood and bone?

They were good men, as good men go,
preoccupied with hogs and oats;
good politicians of the plow,
lamenting taxes, casting votes;
good Christian people of the sort
that say their prayers, but cut them short;
good men, cocksure that they could get
their share, with God and guts and sweat:
working, breeding, eating, dying
respectable and poor, from trying
to be respectable and rich . . .

It's with such stuff I'm stayed and steeped.

*Such stuff! infested with the itch
to sow, who have already reaped
a double poverty!*

No fool

was ever born too poor, I trust,
to use his fathers for a tool
to farm those fathers' fathers' dust.

HOWARD NUTT

ELIZABETH JANE ASTLEY

Three New Sonnets

lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Notice her quietly, but definitely experimental metrical patterns. These poems were presented to us without title.

WALTER BENTON

Poem, To You, Captive

has had poems published in several of the better magazines. He lives in Warren, Ohio.

WITTER BYNNER

Epitaph, Florida Death, Impartial Be

is a veteran of the 1910 poetic generation. He has published many books, of varied content. His home is now in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

LAWRENCE A. HARPER

Ordination

lives in Los Angeles, California. He is one of the rising generation, and has written chiefly for the little magazines.

HOWARD NUTT

Habit of Speech

will be remembered by our readers for his *Dollarica* poems, in last Summer's issue. He is a librarian in Peoria, Illinois.

KENNETH W. PORTER

Deserted Cornfield, 1861-1933

now lives most of the year in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was born in Sterling, Kansas. He was one of the Eleven Midwestern Poets in a recent *New Republic*.

KERKER QUINN

Diurne

is the Editor of the quarterly review, *Direction*. He also lives in Peoria.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT

Grant Wood's American Landscape

of Providence, R. I. is by now a well-known younger poet and critic. He is also an authority on John Greenleaf Whittier.

